

Kazantzakis' *Kapodistrias*, a (Rejected) Offering to Divided Greece, 1944–1946

PETER BIEN

During the years of the German Occupation (1941–4), Nikos Kazantzakis was confined to the island of Aegina. Unable to participate in the Resistance, he vowed (a) to re-enter politics as soon as the Germans left, and (b) to devote the years of enforced confinement to liberating himself from all his manuscripts.¹ But the second part of the vow was not as selfish as it might seem, nor was it unrelated to the first. This is because the intellectual challenges which Kazantzakis set himself during the Occupation were almost all concerned with his country's welfare. More specifically, they were an attempt to investigate, define, and evoke that elusive quality 'Greekness' in preparation for the time when he and his compatriots, once again free, would presumably be attempting to apply their self-knowledge to the everyday problems of reconstituting the nation's political life.

This is a huge subject, first because Kazantzakis was not alone in the investigation of Greekness,² and secondly because his own

1. Helen Kazantzakis, *Nikos Kazantzakis, a Biography Based on His Letters* (New York, 1968), p. 417.

2. The investigation of Greekness took impetus from the death of Kostis Palamas on 27 February 1943, since this was perceived as a watershed in Greek cultural life. Various essays on Palamas became excuses for an investigation of what defines Greek civilization and what therefore ought to be the basis for a reconstructed Greece after the war. See in particular George Seferis' 'Kostis Palamas', first delivered as a funeral oration on 10 March 1943, reprinted in *Δοκίμεις*, 3rd ed., I (Athens, 1974), 215–27. The same impetus accounts for his seminal essay on Makriyannis, which dates from 16 May 1943 (*ibid.*, pp.

investigations during the Occupation involved such a huge body of work: the novel *Alexis Zorbas*, five ambitious plays (the *Prometheia* trilogy, *Kapodistrias* and *Constantine Palaiologos*), and extensive sketches for a neohellenic epic to be called *Akritas*.

Elsewhere, I have attempted to interpret *Alexis Zorbas* in relation to Kazantzakis' larger concerns during the Occupation;³ now I should like to focus on *Kapodistrias*, because I consider it the best of the five plays, a work which deserves, I believe, to be translated, studied, and revived on the stage. A secondary reason for focusing on *Kapodistrias* is provided by its sensational première on 25 March 1946 and its suppression a month later. Alone of Kazantzakis' many plays (if we omit *Day is Breaking*, produced in 1907), *Kapodistrias* entered the nation's theatrical and political life in a direct way—though briefly. It can and should be viewed therefore against a background not only of the Occupation years when it was composed, but also of the terrible years 1945–6 between the first and second Civil Wars.

Kazantzakis, always interested in contemporary problems, preferred to treat them indirectly, by means of appropriate analogues drawn from history or mythology. Thus he was always alert to historical or mythological situations which offered possibilities for elaboration. In 1942, while sketching *Akritas*' journey through the totality of Byzantine and modern Greek history, Kazantzakis jotted down a little note for the future: 'Kapodistrias; ρωμείκη jungle, they kill him: drama.'⁴ This seed lay dormant until 1944 when he read George Theotokas' newly-written play about Kapodistrias,⁵ and wrote

228–63). The controversy over Kazantzakis' *Odyssey*, precipitated by Basil Laourdas' critique and aired in the pages of *Nea Estia* from August through November 1943, was really a debate about Greekness. But the discussion, though intensified in 1943, goes back to the Metaxas period, as is clear from Kazantzakis' travel articles on the Morea (1937) and from Seferis' 'Dialogue on Poetry: What is Meant by Hellenism' (1938–9).

3. 'The Mellowed Nationalism of Kazantzakis' *Zorba the Greek*, *Review of National Literatures*, V (1974), 113–36.

4. Τετρακόσια γράμματα του Καζαντζάκη στον Πρεβελάκη (Athens, 1965), p. 488.

5. 'Αντάρα στ' Ανάπλι, reprinted in his *Νεοελληνικό λαϊκό θέατρο* (Athens, 1965). The play was written in 1942.

to its author: 'If I had here in my solitude the requisite aids so that I could study Kapodistrias' life, I would be overcome by the temptation to write a drama on this theme'.⁶ The temptation apparently did overcome him, for in May 1944 he informed Theotokas:

I don't think I'm going to escape; I'll write *Kapodistrias*. All the spade-work has been completed—the whole plan, the central idea, the details. But I'm holding back; I don't want to begin until you do me the favour again of re-lending me Makriyannis for a few days. . . .⁷

Theotokas sent him a copy of the *Memoirs*, a book difficult to secure at that time. Kazantzakis set to work immediately, and finished in two months.

Kazantzakis did not have to stretch his materials in order to suggest parallelisms between Kapodistrias' time and the end of the German Occupation. In 1828–31, Greece had emerged from foreign occupation into 'liberty', only to find itself harrowed by an internal factionalism reflecting external pressures by France, England and Russia, the 'protecting' Powers. In 1944, Greece was again emerging from foreign occupation and was again harrowed by internal conflicts reflecting the rivalry between external power-blocs. The need, in both eras, was obviously for peace, justice, unity, concord, and constructive rebuilding—precisely the goals which Kapodistrias had set for himself, and which, Kazantzakis was implying, some new Kapodistrias would have to set for himself as soon as the Germans were gone. There was also a natural, unforced parallelism between the social problems in the two eras: hungry, homeless masses on the one hand, powerful figures out for their own best interests, on the other. Historically, this was brought to a focus in the question of land-distribution,⁸ which Kazantzakis emphasized in his drama since

6. The letter, dated Easter 1944, is cited in Theotokas, *Νεοελληνικό λαϊκό θέατρο*, p. 400.

7. Ibid.

8. On the problem of land distribution in its larger context, see: J. A. Petropoulos, *Politics and Statecraft in the Kingdom of Greece, 1833–1943* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 107–25; C. M. Woodhouse, *Capodistria* (London, 1972), pp. 403–4; C. Tsoucalas, *The Greek Tragedy* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 18–19.

it provided a natural, unforced parallel (in attitudes, at least) to the twentieth-century struggle in Greece between socialism and capitalism. I needn't elaborate further, because Kazantzakis' difficulty—as it turned out—was hardly that of convincing people about the existence of parallels. Especially by 1946, the parallels were all too clear; the same issues—*λαός* v. primates, democracy v. monarchy—were alive and raging. Nor was Greece's first president in any way remote. On the contrary, he was part of the current situation. C. M. Woodhouse, for example, recalls the communist guerrilla leader Aris Veloukhiotis vilifying Kapodistrias in outdoor lectures delivered in Greek villages during the early days of the Resistance.⁹ Conversely, the right looked upon Kapodistrias with favour.

Kazantzakis, aware of these polarized attitudes towards Kapodistrias, took up the challenge. If the partisan viewpoints could be transcended by means of art, Greece would move one step closer to unity. His intention, unmistakable in the play itself, is confirmed and reinforced in a gloss published shortly after the work was mounted by the National Theatre.¹⁰ Even after more than a century, Kazantzakis says, we still do not view this figure justly. 'The leftists condemn him as a tyrant, the rightists hymn him as a great martyr. He was both.' Kazantzakis goes on to say that in his treatment he wished to 'push aside all the ephemeral political and social ideologies of our epoch'. Instead, he wished to show Kapodistrias as a man of 'ascetic, fiery purity', a man who sought the impossible—to impose order on chaos—and who, having finally understood that his existence only aggravated the dissensions in the land, 'headed modestly, resolutely, without big words—indeed with a certain impatience—towards death. Not because he loved death, but because he loved Greece.'

9. Personal communication, London, 4 March 1971. See Woodhouse's Preface to *Kapodistria*, p. vii: Aris condemned Kapodistrias 'as a ruthless foreign tyrant who had corrupted Greece and deprived the Greek people of the independence for which they had fought. As I came to know Aris Veloukhiotis better, I became increasingly convinced that anyone whom he hated with such intensity, more than a century after his death, must be of sufficient interest to be worth study.'

10. 'Kapodistrias', *Ἐλεύθερος*, 31 March 1946; excerpts reprinted in *Nea Estia*, XXXIX (1946), 255.

In this gloss, Kazantzakis affirms his effort to rise above a partisan interpretation, but then, in explaining the means of transcendence as a pushing aside of ephemeral ideologies in order to reach Kapodistrias' 'ascetic purity', fails to do full justice, I believe, to what we actually see in the play. (We should remember D. H. Lawrence's famous admonition: 'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.')¹¹ The play does not simply push the left and the right aside, ignoring them for something else. No, to some degree at least, it grapples with the partisan views and tries to discover ways for them to coexist. At the same time, it implicitly projects the concept of Greekness which Kazantzakis, along with others, had been attempting to clarify and articulate during the Occupation period.

In examining the various ways in which the play rises above factional dissensions without just ignoring them, and in which it attempts to offer not just a metaphysics of heroic pessimism but something politically relevant albeit elusive, we may begin by discussing the character Makriyannis, whom George Seferis, in his renowned lecture of 16 May 1943, had hailed as the inheritor of a popular tradition going back two thousand years, and whom Kazantzakis uses as a vehicle for blunt honesty, dignified endurance despite repeated frustration, the yearning for good government and above all for justice, the willingness to subordinate personal gain to communal good—qualities which Kazantzakis, Seferis and others saw as defining the Greek people at their best. In Kazantzakis' Makriyannis we meet (in Seferis' phrase) 'a man of man's dimensions, neither a superman nor a worm', someone able to say 'we' instead of just 'I'.¹² But the Makriyannis we see in the play is not simply the symbolic figure resurrected by Greek intellectuals in 1942–44 as an epitome of the *λαϊκὸ πνεῦμα*. He is also the man we meet directly in the *Memoirs*. There we find him struggling to be fair-minded about Kapodistrias, yet forced to realize that when a man becomes a tyrant he must be opposed for the good of the nation. Likewise, we find him squarely against the factional leaders all pressing

11. *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York, 1923), p. 3.

12. *Δοκίμεις*, 3rd ed., I, p. 256; *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism*, tr. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos (London, 1966), p. 57. On Makriyannis as inheritor of the popular tradition, see pp. 35–6 in the translated version; on 'I' versus 'we', see pp. 28–9, 57.

their own advantage, yet sympathetic towards Giorghakis and Constandis Mavromichalis when they are released penniless from prison and immediately dunned by their creditors (Makriyannis lent Giorghakis 300 piastres),¹³ and especially sympathetic when Kapodistrias acts with scornful superiority towards these men who, after all, had fought and suffered for their country. At the same time, however, Makriyannis retains his appreciation of Kapodistrias' dilemma, continually terming the Governor 'unfortunate' and suggesting that the real villains are his brothers and other close advisers. In short, the historical Makriyannis displayed that lovable and all-too-human inconsistency which rests upon something very consistent indeed: a primary, unwavering concern for human dignity. All this is reflected in the play, and always with the implication that the qualities embodied in Makriyannis represent Greekness at its best. I stress this because in certain outward details Kazantzakis departs from the historical record: he has Makriyannis personally convince Kapodistrias to distribute the land (pp. 26–7),¹⁴ personally warn him about the danger ahead (p. 16), and he also makes him the Governor's one remaining friend at the end—the only associate who has not stormed off in a huff to 'liberate Greece' by furthering his own interests. In this, however, Kazantzakis is fully true to the spirit of Makriyannis' character as we know it, even if not, perhaps, to the letter. But in emphasizing the General's allegiance to Kapodistrias, he by no means overlooks the other side. Makriyannis is made to remonstrate with the Governor about the plague of spies throughout the land (p. 19); he openly denounces Kapodistrias' brothers (p. 20); he recommends that Petrobey Mavromichalis be released, that rebellious Hydra be forgiven (p. 24), that Kapodistrias conquer his obstinacy and become reconciled with all. He does this despite his own great antipathy towards self-seekers such as Kolokotronis (p. 81)—because his prime concern is love of the *patrida* (p. 18).¹⁵ He realizes, finally, that in order for Greeks to say 'we' at this

13. Στρατηγού Μακρυγιάννη 'Απομνημονεύματα (Athens, Galaxia, 1964), p. 318.

14. Page references to *Kapodistrias* are from Nikos Kazantzakis, *Θέατρο Γ', τραγωδίες με διάφορα θέματα* (Athens, 1956).

15. Cf. *Απομνημονεύματα*, p. 313.

point, the *pallikariá* of earlier days must be suppressed, the knife laid down:

Τὸ χασαπειὸ σφαλῶ· τῶν ἀδερφῶν μου κρέας,
πιὰ δὲν πουλῶ, σφουγγίζω τὸ μαχαίρι· φτάνει! (p. 93)

In the play, therefore, as well as in the *Memoirs*, we encounter a figure whose inconsistencies arise from a deeper consistency and who—in the very best sense, that suggested by Seferis—is a man of man's dimensions, neither a superman nor a worm. It is important that Kazantzakis lets Makriyannis remain at Kapodistrias' side until the very end, so that he may embrace the dying leader and weepingly voice the lament with which the play concludes. Quite aside from the symbolism in this embrace (the union of mind and heart, west and east), Kazantzakis here allows Makriyannis to be, so to speak, the sole survivor in the tragedy. In the Shakespearian dramatic convention, the character in this role, the one who speaks last, is normally the person who will re-establish order, who will put the world back into joint. We feel this same convention operative here, even though Kapodistrias has sent for Kolokotronis to take over and even though we know from history that the period following Kapodistrias' death was one of hopeless chaos. Kazantzakis is suggesting, despite historical fact (or, on a deeper level, because of it) that the qualities represented by Makriyannis, by the Greek people, did indeed survive and were effective in the long run in transmitting something admirable (again, let us call it 'Greekness') from generation to generation. As Makriyannis himself said in the *Memoirs*: '... we Greeks have always happened to be few. . . . From the beginning to the end, in ancient times and today, all the wild beasts have been trying to eat us up and have failed. They eat up some of us, but the yeast remains. . . .' ¹⁶

Although in the political reality of 1943–6 a factionalized Greece saw Kapodistrias either as tyrant or martyr, in the play this dichotomy is easily, naturally subsumed in Makriyannis' resolute compassion: a unified Greekness which is able to transcend narrow partisanship because it registers life's complexities.

16. Ibid., p. 237. Cited by Seferis, *Δοκίμεις*, I, p. 258; *On the Greek Style*, p. 59.

The partisan issues reflected in the play go much deeper than the slogans 'tyrant' or 'martyr' might indicate. In this work, as in others, Kazantzakis most basically is struggling with the ideological dichotomy that had solidified in Greek intellectual life between the two world wars: the Aristotelian view of man as a *ζῶον πολιτικόν* whose individual existence cannot be distinguished from his social and historical environment, versus the existentialist view of man as ultimately alone, ontologically solitary.¹⁷ The presence of this dichotomy in Greece explains, for example, the nature of an attack on Kazantzakis by Kostas Varnalis, an articulate spokesman for Marxism, whose critique of Kazantzakis took the form of a destructive analysis of existentialism.¹⁸ But Kazantzakis was attacked with equal energy (though less sophistication) by the other side. Actually, his *œuvre* tends to lie in a philosophical no-man's-land between the two views, and one way by which we can judge, or at least classify, his individual works is to ask how effectively—or ineffectively—they allow the two ideologies to coexist. Is a creative dialectic established between them, are they synthesized in a convincing way, or do they simply grate against each other like badly meshed gears? In the case of *Kapodistrias*, part of the play's interest comes, I believe, from its successful bridging of this ideological chasm. The protagonist's self-willed death is the private exit, to be sure, of an existentialist hero: an ontologically solitary being. At the same time, however, this death is the ultimate political act—resembling the 'good deaths' of Katow and Kyo in André Malraux's *La Condition humaine*. In dying, Kapodistrias paradoxically acts as a *ζῶον πολιτικόν*, affirming his belief that man fulfils himself through the community. The existential and Aristotelian factors leading to the play's dénouement are so intertwined, intertwined furthermore in such a natural and unforced way, that we feel here that Kazantzakis has achieved a synthesis which is somehow a

17. Obviously, this ideological split was not unique to Greece. For an analysis of the broader situation in Europe as a whole, see G. Lukács, 'The Ideology of Modernism', in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London, 1963), pp. 17–46.

18. 'Ὁ Ὑπαρξισμός: Φιλοσοφία καὶ φιλολογία τῆς ἀντίδρασης, Πρὸςπάσης, 18 Sept. 1947, p. 2. As manifestations of existentialism, Varnalis cites not only Kazantzakis' philosophical nihilism but Sikelianos' Delphic idea, Tsatsos' 'mythologism' and the surrealism of 'the Clique'.

creative transcendence. And this synthesis of the conflicting ideologies of the right and the left is encountered not only in the play's dénouement, but in the entire treatment from beginning to end. It might be helpful, as a means of seeing this, to recall the details of Varnalis' article against existentialism—especially since it was published in 1947 and thus reflected leftist opinion more or less at the time *Kapodistrias* was written and produced. Varnalis says (1) that existentialism is suicidal: its deepest belief is that true existence will be found only in death. Furthermore (2), it preaches the pure biological being as the true existential being: the less a man thinks, the more truly does he exist. This anti-rationalism is reactionary, against the people, says Varnalis. Existentialism (3) isolates the individual from the community, the 'I' from the 'we'. Because it ignores the existence of classes or class struggle, it inhibits progress towards a better world. The true man (4) is neither Nietzsche's 'superman' nor Sartre's 'subman' (ὁπάνθρωπος), not a death-obsessed isolate, but the man who combines experience, knowledge and action, who struggles continually (ὁ ἀγωνιστής), and who 'consciously and progressively transforms the world'. He is (5) 'the optimist who loves life and those like him, . . . who conquers nature and his enemies'.

If we measure *Kapodistrias* against these formulations, we can see to what extent Kazantzakis achieves a synthesis. (1) His hero is ontologically solitary, ultimately alone in his futile struggle against a universal destructiveness. At the same time, his individual existence cannot be distinguished from his social and historical environment; he lives in context, and the destructiveness he battles is very much not ahistorical. The play offers both views, the ahistorical and historical, making us realize that on some higher level of understanding they are both true even though they would seem to be mutually contradictory.¹⁹ Though *Kapodistrias* seeks his fulfilment in a good death, the only ultimate response to fate, he is not suicidal. On the contrary, death for him is a last resort, and his acceptance of the inevitable does not come because he has

19. It would be interesting to compare Woodhouse's analysis of the historical figure in his *Kapodistria*, p. ix *et passim*. For Woodhouse, the mutually contradictory polarities synthesized by *Kapodistrias* are nationalism and internationalism.

weakly lost the will to go on fighting for a better world; it comes because he realizes that his only remaining weapon in the particular historical struggle is the power of his freely-willed death. (2) Far from submitting to the anti-rationalist tendency in existentialism, Kazantzakis (in this play, as opposed to many of his other works) gives us a hero whose main attribute is his intellect, a hero whose strongest desire is to make a rational world. (3) Though Kapodistrias is isolated from the community by force of events combined with his own defects of personality, he still wishes to say 'we' instead of 'I'. To reinforce this communal spirit in the play as a whole, Kazantzakis gives us Makriyannis. Far from ignoring the existence of classes or class struggle, the drama everywhere reminds us of the division between the people and the primates, between Kapodistrias himself—the Count—and his subjects. (4) The Governor, while ontologically solitary, is at the same time neither a subman (anti-rational) nor a superman. He is human, neither impossibly good nor impossibly bad: a man built to the dimensions of man. (5) Combining experience, knowledge and action, he struggles to transform the world, maintaining his optimism even in the bitterness of failure.

I realize that these justifications may sound, if not casuistic, then certainly oxymoronic. 'Ontologically solitary yet communal in spirit . . .'; 'optimistic in bitterness . . .' This is because discursive analysis cannot reproduce what actually happens in a work of art; it can only highlight certain facets and then retreat to an intuitive understanding which asserts—rather than proves—that the work of art achieves a synthesis of contraries. The critic aids the reader or viewer by establishing what the contraries are; the reader or viewer must then decide for himself (granted that the critic's analysis is correct up to that point) whether these contraries add up simply to intellectual confusion—as I believe they do in many of Kazantzakis' works—or whether, by means of some mysterious alchemy, they are transmuted into a higher coherence, as I believe they are in this work.

To attempt a synthesis of conflicting ideologies, presenting Kapodistrias neither as a pure existentialist nor as a pure Aristotelian, but as a convincing amalgam of both, and thereby suggesting the inadequacy of factionalist views, was Kazantzakis'

way of contributing to his nation's renewal at this crucial moment in its history, 1944–6.

I wish to strengthen my case now by extending the analysis to a different area. So far, we have examined the play's basic purpose of being a 'cry' against factionalism by analysing (1) the character Makriyannis, and (2) the unstated ideologies implicit in the action. (Each of these analyses is of course inadequate—merely a suggestion of method, as opposed to a thorough treatment.) I wish now to turn to an area more narrowly technical. Here, despite my disclaimers about the 'mysterious alchemy', we may perhaps begin to understand analytically, to some small degree, how a work of art joins opposites into a synthesis.

Literature's strongest weapon, *qua* art, is metaphor—'a figure of speech in which two unlike objects are compared by identification or by the substitution of one for the other'.²⁰ I say '*qua* art' because literature also functions in other ways, employing modes of discourse which approximate those of everyday communication. But the something extra—the alchemy—provided by literature must be achieved by specifically artistic elements of speech such as rhythm, symbolism, euphony, cacophony, and—above all—metaphor. Kazantzakis was always searching for effective, alive metaphors, but his search was complicated first by his desire to say something about the present without saying anything about it directly, and secondly, by his desire to speak about 'eternal problems' instead of just ephemeral ones. Returning to our ideological analysis, we could assert that he wished, via metaphor, to be able to speak about man's universal, existential situation at the same time that he spoke about a specific, historical problem. His normal method was to employ myth as metaphor. This was supposed to accomplish the desired universalization, but it often worked against the desired emotional power of metaphor because myth, in our technological age, tends to be remote and evasive, not immediate and palpable, as it ought to be. Instead of heightening history, strengthening it through universalization, myth may do the opposite. Instead of concretizing the abstract,

20. K. Beckson and A. Ganz, *A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms* (New York, 1960), p. 119.

it may offer something equally abstract: a mere concept, not a felt reality. An example occurs, I believe, in Kazantzakis' controversy with Basil Laourdas,²¹ where he expresses his abstract, contemporary doctrine of heroic pessimism through the metaphor of the 'Cretan glance'—dancers bravely eyeing the bull that will inevitably destroy them. Despite all Kazantzakis' efforts previously in the *Odyssey*, this metaphor remains dead and unevocative: it is 'of the lamp', not a truly living, felt reality in the consciousness of twentieth-century Greeks.

In *Kapodistrias*, however, Kazantzakis' material encouraged him to employ historical personalities, events and allusions sufficiently proximate to be alive in the modern Greek consciousness, yet sufficiently remote to possess mythic force. At one point, for example (p. 121), the Governor compares life in general to the cliff at Zalongo. We are at the brink, pursued by Turks, and there seems to be no escape. But there is an escape: we may embrace our fate with our own free wills, and jump, opening the great wings of freedom. In this way, and this way only, can we overcome fate and conclude, as Kapodistrias does:

Δὲν εἶναι ἡ Μοῖρα παντοδύναμη· ἡ ψυχὴ ἔναι
τοῦ ἀγνοῦ κι ἀπελπισμένου ἀνθρώπου!

Taken out of context, these lines are embarrassing: the worst kind of obsessional didacticism—reiterated *idée fixe*—that mars all of Kazantzakis' work. Yet if we place the lines in context we must admit that the very doctrine which we may find repulsive or meaningless in its abstract formulation, we now find perfectly convincing—indeed extraordinarily moving—because to it has been fused the dance at Zalongo. This is living history for every Greek, yet history which at the same time has acquired the force of myth (that 'collective fantasy embodying ideals and memories')²² and which thus lends itself to the kind of universalization which Kazantzakis here puts upon it, the suicidal dancers becoming mankind and the Turks the 'eternal Turk'—fate—pursuing us inexorably to the abyss. But this concretion in terms of Zalongo is just one metaphor used in the

21. 'Ἐνα οχόλιο στὴν «Ὁδύσεια», *Nea Estia*, XXXIV (1943), 1033.

22. H. Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (Bloomington, 1969), p. xiii.

play and naturally does not occupy the centre of our awareness throughout. I cite it because in miniature it indicates what Kazantzakis was able to accomplish with his central, dominating metaphor, which of course is the story of Kapodistrias' assassination. Here too we have history with the force of myth, for the figures of Kolokotronis, Petrobey, Makriyannis, and the plight of Kapodistrias himself, are alive and emotive in the consciousness of every Greek; in today's psychological jargon, they possess 'affect'. Using these concretions as his tools, Kazantzakis is able to do what all successful tragedians should do: give us a sense that the hero is trapped by historical and psychological forces which are at the same time somehow ahistorical, metaphysical.²³ As we read the play, we know that we have before us people who lived and died in a particular time and place; yet we also see the 'eternal Kolokotronis', and are able to universalize the appalling factionalism of 1831 into fate breaking down the mind's attempt to impose order upon chaos. By means of metaphor, the factionalism of particular versus universal is transcended; our awareness is raised to the higher, more inclusive, circle of synthesizing vision; myth and history become myth-history.

We must remember that Kazantzakis conceived this play not only as a cry against the *ρωμείκες* jungles of the 1830s and 1940s, but also as an investigation of Greekness in the best sense. These two purposes were entirely congruent, since in the larger, broadly cultural concern about Greekness, just as in the more narrowly political concern about factionalism, synthesis was the goal. This is not the place to describe the extensive and very self-conscious quest for Greekness preoccupying major intellectual figures during the Occupation;²⁴ let me simply venture the statement that the quest for Greekness was in effect a quest for a

23. Here, Kazantzakis' interpretation differs from that of Woodhouse, who, in analysing Kapodistrias' affinities with tragic heroes, asserts that his 'catastrophe was not due to fate or destiny, though he faced it with a philosophical fatalism based on his favourite maxim: "Let us do our duty, and Providence will do the rest"' (p. x). Cf. p. 512: '[Capodistria's] tragedy was that of a Shakespearian hero, at least as defined by A. C. Bradley: a good man raised to high estate by his own merits, and then utterly cast down by a combination of character and circumstance.'

24. See footnote 2, above.

synthetic vision of Greece's entire cultural history: archaic, classical, Hellenistic, Byzantine and modern, including of course Greece's affinities with the West and with the East. It is no accident that the five plays Kazantzakis wrote between August 1943 and September 1944 embraced the ancient period (*Promethia* trilogy), the medieval (*Constantine Palaiologos*) and the modern (*Kapodistrias*). Nor is it an accident that in *Kapodistrias* one of the characters is made to invoke these periods and at the same time to miss the point, believing that the new Greece can escape its past:

*Μήτε Έλληνες παλιοὶ οἱ Ρωμιοί, μὲ τσελεμπίες,
μὴδὲ βυζαντινοὶ καλόγεροι μὲ ράσο·
μὴδὲ καὶ Φράγκοι ψαλιδόκωλοι, οὔτε Τοῦρκοι,
μὴδὲ καὶ ρούσικες χαχόλικες ἀρκοῦδες·
χαρμάνι ἀλλόκοτο στὴ γῆς αὐτῇ, καινούριο! (p. 55)*

Kazantzakis disagreed with this view, and this disagreement is conveyed by means of a technique which multiplies the drama's metaphors. The contemporary situation of 1944–6 is expressed metaphorically via *Kapodistrias*' passion and assassination; in this way, the present is linked with the revolutionary period. But both of these periods are then linked (a) with the *tourkokratia* because *Kapodistrias* is treated as the *protomastoras* of the ballad 'The Bridge of Arta', and (b) with Byzantine times because *Kapodistrias* is treated as an ascetic Christ in the manner of the early saints and martyrs.

This syncretism of course very dangerous technically, since it can so easily produce a feeling not of synthesis but of confusion. In this regard, Walter Kerr's criticism of Kazantzakis' play *Sodom and Gomorrah* is instructive: 'The effort to see all myths as essentially one is not a play; it is a research project. The root difficulty . . . is in the dramatist's deliberate reach, which is an overreach.'²⁵

Kapodistrias does better, probably because the two additional metaphors are so clearly justified by the larger thematic concerns about Greekness and synthesizing vision, because they are never importunate, and because both are natural parallels

25. 'Burn Me to Ashes', *New York Herald Tribune*, 20 Nov. 1963.

suggested by the realistic situation and not arbitrarily imposed upon that situation by the author.

Kapodistrias, as the *protomastoras* or 'chief mason', has come to a country in ruins with the mission of rebuilding it, using schools, laws and concord as his cornerstones. An intellectual, he sees the full circle—possesses in his mind the complete blueprint for the new state, not just fragmented plans (p. 94). On to this architectural metaphor, Kazantzakis grafts the traditional story of the *protomastoras* known to every Greek through the famous ballad. In «*Τῆς Ἀρτας τὸ γιοφύρι*» the chief mason is attempting to bridge a raging stream, and no sooner does he complete his structure than it is washed out. He is told that if the bridge is to stand he must sacrifice not an orphan, a stranger or a passer-by, but his own beautiful wife, *παρὰ τοῦ πρωτομάστορα τὴν ὥρια τὴ γυναῖκα*, burying her in the masonry. He does this and the structure holds. In 1908 Kazantzakis had used this song as the basis of his most uncompromisingly nationalistic drama, appropriately entitled «*Ὁ Πρωτομάστορας*». There, the torrent is fate itself: all that attempts to defeat man's will. The chief mason is youthful, virile Greece complete with Nietzschean-Dragoumian attributes of self-discipline wedded to huge dreams. Directing himself with ruthless logic, he performs the sacrifice, builds the bridge, conquers fate, and is ready to move to the next exploit—why not the recapture of Constantinople!²⁶ The play *Kapodistrias*, written thirty-six years later, is reminiscent of the older drama in many ways, but also very instructive because of its differences. Kazantzakis retains the central idea that the mason must somehow build something over the destructive force of fate itself. In *Kapodistrias* the raging torrent becomes Greek factionalism, the bridge a viable state. The difference, of course, is that fate is not conquered now so easily, if at all. Though the Greece of both 1831 and 1941 was, in a sense, young—that is, on the verge of a new beginning—Kazantzakis could no longer maintain the superficial, unthinking optimism of *The Masterbuilder*.²⁷

26. For a more extensive analysis, see: P. Bien, 'Kazantzakis' *The Masterbuilder*, with an additional note on *Kapodistrias*, *The Literary Review*, XVIII (1975), 398–411.

27. I translate the title in this way, rather than 'The Chief Mason', because of the work's obvious indebtedness to Ibsen.

Kapodistrias is both nationalistic and optimistic, but the nationalism it projects is the ‘mellowed’ type I have tried to define elsewhere in relation to *Alexis Zorbas*.²⁸ If we compare the two plays we note that the protagonist in the second is older and wiser; that the self-assurance, the crazy *palikariá* and the allegiance to the Great Idea seen in the earlier hero are now given to Giorgchakis Mavromichalis, i.e. to the force that brings the building toppling down. The nationalistic qualities offered in 1944–6 are the mellowed ones we see in Makriyannis and in Zorba: dignity in the face of suffering, endurance, faith that the cycles will continue, that the yeast will remain. But the greatest change is in the song itself, which Kazantzakis alters here to suit his needs. In the original, and in the 1908 play, the *protomastoras* was called upon to sacrifice someone dear to him; in the present version he is called upon to sacrifice himself:

*“Αν δὲ στοιχειώσετε ἄνθρωπο, γεφύρι δὲ στεριώνει·
καὶ μὴ στοιχειώσετε ὀρφανό, μὴν ξένο, μὴ διαβάτη,
παρὰ τὸν Πρωτομάστορα . . .* (pp. 119–20)

The masterbuilder must build himself into his edifice if it is to have any hope of standing. This is of course precisely what the historical Kapodistrias did. By taking the facts and paralleling to them the altered version of ‘The Bridge of Arta’, Kazantzakis universalizes Kapodistrias’ sacrifice without eroding its particularity, gives it a mythic quality without paling its reality. By means of the parallel, Kapodistrias becomes the type of all those who built themselves into the edifice of Hellenism throughout Greek history, and not just a man who was assassinated on 9 October 1831.

The second parallel follows from the first. Fortunately, it too is never presented with stridency, and thus it can serve to add a universalizing and synthesizing overtone, without alienating us

28. See footnote 3, above. The article in question attempts to see Alexis Zorbas as a projection, in part, of Kazantzakis’ matured appreciation of his countrymen based on their endurance during the terrible first winter of the Occupation. In the novel, Zorbas replaces Stavridakis as the Boss’s ‘saint’; similarly, in Kazantzakis’ own life a mellowed, compassionate nationalism had replaced his Dragoumian nationalism of the 1910s, after two decades in which he had despised all forms of Greek nationalism.

through inartistic importunity. This second parallel follows from the first because Christ, like the *protomastoras* in Kazantzakis' altered version, had to build himself into the edifice he was creating, *θανάτῳ θάνατον παρήσας*, conquering death by dying. Like Christ entering Jerusalem, Kapodistrias comes to Greece in triumph, treading on the myrtles and laurels with which the rejoicing populace have strewn his path (p. 138). The next three years are his passion: he feels that his efforts have been repaid with a crown of thorns (p. 40), that he is a martyr thrown to the lions (p. 91)—his one consolation being that he has chosen this path of his own free will. In the end, just like the real Kapodistrias,²⁹ he goes knowingly to his death, which Kazantzakis transfers from 9 October to Easter Sunday (p. 129). Like Christ, Kapodistrias failed to establish the Kingdom in the political way expected of him, and he makes his exit in terms of a defeat which will, one hopes, be the prelude to a future victory: a resurrection. It is schematic of course and surely marred by Kazantzakis' high-handed use of Easter *Sunday* for the crucifixion in defiance not only of Greek political history but of divine history; yet on balance it is aesthetically justified because it enables Kazantzakis to convey his optimism in a manner much more effective than that of didactic importunity, and also enables him to extend the play's synthesizing reach to include the ascetic Christianity associated in particular with the martyr-saints of the early Byzantine era.

For completeness, I must add here that Kazantzakis also took care to make his dramatic technique embrace the classical and pre-classical eras. The chorus, present in the second and third acts, evokes the flavour of ancient Greek drama, yet Kazantzakis avoids the slavish adherence to the ancient format which made his *Prometheia* so sterile. Another element from the ancient drama is the crazed prophetess. Behind the figure of the Souliótissa we see Aeschylus' Cassandra joined as well to Homeric reminiscences in so far as this sole survivor of the dance at Zalongo has, like Odysseus, been granted entrée to the realms of the dead. She brings back news of the slaughtered heroes—not now the heroes of Troy, but those of '21 (pp. 117–19). The synthesis is effortless and evocative, a reach which is not an overreach because it draws from living myth flavoured lightly

29. *Μακρυγιάννη Ἀπομνημονεύματα*, p. 319; Woodhouse, pp. 500–1.

with remembrances of the past. Kazantzakis completes the various linkages by having the Souliótissa give her oracle in the form of the famous demotic ballad we have already considered.

The various forms of synthesis which we have seen in our analysis of the character Makriyannis, of the ideological clash between existentialism and Aristotelianism, and of the use of metaphor: these are collectively, I repeat, an offering which Kazantzakis presented to Greece at a moment when the state had to be reconstituted on the basis of some blend extracted from the past while neither servile to, nor contemptuous of, that past, and when the need existed for an optimistic nationalism based not on *pallikariá* but on the more sober foundation of Hellenism's endurance for three millennia despite the ravages of fate and the inadequacies of its own leaders. For all this, Kapodistrias' assassination was a perfect subject. If Kazantzakis could synthesize and transcend the leftists' limited view of the Governor as a tyrant and the rightists' equally limited view of him as a blameless martyr, presenting his protagonist as both, and thereby suggesting the inadequacy of factionalist narrowness, he would contribute—in the artistic way most natural to him—to his nation's renewal.

We remember, however, that Kazantzakis wished to contribute not only in this way that was natural to him, as artist, but also in another way most assuredly unnatural, as political leader. I claimed at the start that his devotion to liberating himself from all his manuscripts was not unrelated to his vow to participate directly in politics once the Germans had left, because the literary endeavour, by investigating, defining and evoking Greekness, was helping to create the self-consciousness and self-understanding which would be required later on by those who attempted to reconstitute the state. In the particular case of *Kapodistrias*, the relation between Kazantzakis' literary efforts and his vision of himself as a man of affairs was especially close because, without distorting history to an excessive degree, he was able to project on to the Governor his conception of his own future role as an intellectual in politics.

This was not just a private megalomania. In 1944 Kazantzakis was considered by many the quintessential Greek intellectual: a model for the young, a man whose years of contemplation had equipped him with a wisdom which must now be applied in the

world of practical affairs.³⁰ To some degree, then, Kazantzakis was encouraged by outside factors to see himself as a latter-day Kapodistrias waiting to be called by his nation to constitute a viable state. In any case, the play on one level is a forecast of Kazantzakis' future as a politician—not a very encouraging forecast, to be sure, but one that proved to be remarkably accurate.

Kazantzakis' personal identification with Kapodistrias is all too clear. From the moment the curtain rises, the Governor is characterized as a *γραφιάς*, 'penman'; our first view of him is in his office, with a desk piled high with papers. That he is alone of his type, surrounded by uncultivated beasts, becomes unmistakable as the play proceeds. The ferocious Kolokotronis cries out:

Θέλαμε ἐμεῖς ἐδῶ Ρωμιὸ πασὰ λεβέντη,

 Κι ἦρθε ἡ ἀφεντιά σου ζουρισμένη, μὲ τὴν πένα
 στὸ αὐτί. . . (p. 61)

As for Kapodistrias himself, he despises the strutting *kapetanioi* whom he has been thrust among, and vows to them: « . . . ἐγὼ ὁ γραφιάς, ἐγώ, θὰ σπάσω τὴ σπαθιά σας» (p. 22). On the other hand, Kazantzakis, who never allows things to remain simple, takes care—particularly in this play—not to characterize in terms of types. Thus Kapodistrias, while proud of his intellectuality and culture, is at the same time secretly jealous of a fine young *pallikari* like Giorghakis Mavromichalis:

Τέτοιος
 βαθιὰ λαχτάριζα κι ἐγώ, ὁ γραφιάς, νὰ γίνω,
 παιδὶ ξανθὸ σὰν ἤμουν κι ἔτρεχα καβάλα
 γιὰλὸ γιὰλὸ, μακριά, στὴ γαλανὴ πατρίδα. . . (p. 65)

Note that although Kazantzakis places one of his own *idées fixes* in Kapodistrias' mouth in this case, the idea, because it is

30. This estimation of Kazantzakis is best seen in B. Laourdas, *Σχόλιο σ' ἓνα κριτικὸ δοκίμιο, Νέα Ἑστία*, XXXIV (1943), 1337.

psychologically convincing, becomes dramatically convincing as well, and is not felt as an arbitrary intrusion by the author.

Having established Kapodistrias as a penman, Kazantzakis proceeds to examine the politically-involved intellectual's responsibilities towards himself and towards the community. What, precisely, must the mind do when confronted by evil? The strength of this play resides in its ability to suggest initially the expected—and perhaps naïve—answer in a convincing, non-formulaic manner arising out of the dramatic situation, and then to pass beyond this simplicity in a way which does not nullify what has been surpassed. Kapodistrias at first uses his mind according to the western humanistic tradition, as a force imposing reason on non-reason, order on chaos. He realizes that if reason is to prevail in the political sphere it must also prevail in his own 'little world'. We know his secret admiration of *τρελή παλικάριά* (p. 69); he even confesses to visions of himself in a *foustanela*, mounted on a splendid horse, assaulting Constantinople single-handedly (p. 69). But he controls such insane impulses, giving them rein only in his dreams. And if ever he feels anger or hate running loose inside him, his mind leaps forward at once to bridle these passions and restore calm (p. 33). So much for the man himself, the microcosm. In the macrocosm of Greek politics, this person of rational self-control wishes to impose order on chaos by battling the «πάθη, ντροπές, παλικάριες τυφλές, τιτάνες / άόμματοι» which are the roots of his wild race (p. 29). It is an attempt to 'cultivate' in the horticultural meaning of the term, i.e. to graft on to the strength of the wild root the more highly developed flower or fruit. One could also call it an evolutionary undertaking to be achieved slowly through education: the gradual transubstantiation of all the Kolokotronai and Miaoulides into true human beings—i.e. creatures in whom oriental *élan* has been subjected to the Logos. This was Kazantzakis' definition of the Greek mission in his travel articles on the Morea, written in 1937:

The Orient is the formless; the Greek mind has always been the force which loved and aspired toward one thing above all: form. To give form to the formless, to make reason of the Oriental cry [*να κάμουμε λόγο την ανατολίτικη κραυγή*]; this is our duty. We can deny neither East nor West; both of these

conflicting powers are deep within us, and cannot be extricated. We are obliged either to attain the distillation of East [into] West—in other words, to succeed in a very difficult synthesis—or to struggle on like slaves.³¹

The dramatic situation (not to mention Greece's political condition in 1944 and again in 1946) enabled Kazantzakis to present this formulation of Hellenism's duty in a convincing manner, despite what may have seemed schematic in 1937. Even the simplistic may contain truth, and such truth becomes all the more acceptable if the author is also willing to pass beyond. In this play, as I have argued, Kazantzakis advances to a more complicated view of the mind's struggle with evil, yet does not nullify what has been left behind. On the contrary, the subsequent formulation enhances the prior one and vice versa, because the play as a whole suggests a natural, inevitable evolution in awareness, an evolution in which each stage is proper at its own time, the necessary precondition of what follows.

To see how Kazantzakis develops his treatment of mind in this play and at the same time articulates his sense of his own future role as an intellectual in politics, we might begin with some of the same passage I quoted from the article on the Morea:

The Orient, with its great, myriad cravings and its direct contact with the mystical substance of the world, will always form the warm, dark rich subconscious of the Greek. The mission of the Greek mind has always been *to illumine it*, to organize it, *to make it conscious*.

The italics are mine. What Kazantzakis does in this play is to pass from the mind's role as organizer to its role as illuminator: its power to scale that highest peak of evolution, self-consciousness. The central formulation comes in a speech by

31. *Journey to the Morea* (New York, 1965), p. 171. Originally published in *Kathimerini*, 15 Dec. 1937. Reprinted in *Ταξιδεύοντας: Ίταλία-Αίγυπτος-Σινά-Τερουσαλήμ-Κύπρος-Ό Μοριάς* (Athens, 1965), p. 329. The English version mistranslates *λαμπικάρισμα της Ανατολής* as 'distillation of East and West'; thus my bracketed change.

Kapodistrias, where once again we see one of Kazantzakis' *idées fixes* assimilated convincingly into the dramatic situation. Addressing Kolokotronis, Ghikas and the two Mavromichalaioi—that is, the factionalists who are keeping Greece in chaos—he exclaims:

*Μαλώνετε ὅλοι σας, βογκᾶτε, τὶ καθέννας
μονάχα τὸ δικό του συντηράει σφερό
καὶ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ δεῖ τὸν ἄγιο κύκλον ὅλο·
μὰ ὅλο τὸν κύκλο ἐγὼ θωρῶ κι ἀκέραια κρίνω.* (p. 95)

Kapodistrias sees the whole circle, the others only the small arc of their own time, place, and personal interest. This means, in its simplest application, that Kapodistrias thinks of future Greece, favouring the establishment of schools rather than the mad assault on Constantinople suggested by Giorgchakis Mavromichalis; it means, furthermore, that he says 'we' instead of 'I'. But seeing the whole circle also involves an even more comprehensive illumination in both the political and personal spheres. Kolokotronis must learn to see beyond the Peloponnesos to Greece as a whole; similarly, Kapodistrias, who already sees Greece as a whole, must learn to see beyond this to what can only be called life as a whole. Knowledge of his place in this largest of all circles is the ultimate self-consciousness which mind has the power, and indeed the obligation, to produce. When one is able, like Kazantzakis and like his character Kapodistrias, to project his awareness backward and forward in time, as well as outward in space, he first of all senses the cyclic nature of struggle. His own ephemerality now becomes a factor in his thoughts and actions; he realizes that the grand battles he has been waging for order and civilization can only be fought victoriously by successive leaders, each taking the torch from his predecessor and carrying it further. In addition—and most important of all—he realizes that the forces he has been combating are not just the narrow-minded selfishness of particular people in a particular time and place; they are evil itself. Kapodistrias in this play eventually gains the same insight that Prometheus gained in Kazantzakis' trilogy; he realizes that his real opponent is *Μοίρα*, fate, and that fate is omnipotent. Verbal and thematic links between the two

works help make this clear. Kapodistrias, as we have seen, specifies ‘passions, shame, blind derring-do and eyeless Titans’ as the roots of his fierce race. But in the *Prometheia*, these eyeless Titans are unmistakably all the great natural forces—floods, whirlwinds, fire, earthquakes—which inhibit man’s progress.³² In a word, they are fate, the murderer-god of Kazantzakis’ *Odyssey*,³³ the downward stream of Bergson.³⁴ Kazantzakis—and I think in a way which is not at all ‘suicidal’, despite Varnalis’ critique—is saying that the politically active intellectual must inevitably come to see his struggles in a metaphysical context. Having done so, he will realize that the mind can never impose order fully on chaos, can never defeat the Titans. When we see only our small arc, we can swagger and have great plans; when we see the full circle, we know that the only ultimate certainty is our own defeat and extinction at the hands of an omnipotent, immortal fate. How do these insights affect one’s actual behaviour? There is of course the possibility of withdrawing into the meditative life, something which Kazantzakis allowed his Odysseus to do. But Kapodistrias does not enjoy this possibility; willy-nilly, he must continue as an active, public man. How, then, given the new self-awareness, can the mind continue to deal with evil? With one part of itself, of course, it can continue to act *as if* the establishment of order were possible, can revert in other words to a lower level of understanding. Kazantzakis honours this, but only to a degree. His truly responsible intellectual must face the new insights bravely, and act in accordance with them, incorporating into his political programme the facts (a) of his own inevitable death and (b) of the cyclic nature of human struggle. His ultimate *political* act (yet at the same time one which gives him personal and even ‘existentialist’ salvation) must be a willingness to accept death, indeed to make it his final weapon. This is what Kapodistrias comes to realize (p. 53), and why he refuses to take any action to protect himself from the Mavromichalaioi, even though he knows of their plans to kill him (pp. 9, 65, 70, 97). But

32. *Θέατρο Α', τραγωδίες με αρχαία θέματα* (Athens, 1955), p. 189.

33. See Orpheus’ song, with Odysseus’ continuation, III.116, 371–9.

34. See the famous analogy of the jet of steam, *Creative Evolution* (London, 1911), pp. 260–1, and compare Kazantzakis’ essay ‘H. Bergson’, *Δελτίο του 'Εκπαιδευτικού Όμιλου*, II (1912), 328.

Kapodistrias does not act because of masochism, nihilism, fatalism, a suicidal impulse, or even discouragement. On the contrary, he sees his martyrdom as a positive step, the ultimate affirmation of the human dignity he had hoped to bring to Greece. Beyond this, he hopes that his own extinction may initiate a new cycle, and that his cry of Concord will be taken up by succeeding generations. In his sacrifice, these two insights of complete self-awareness are fused, their apparent antagonism transcended. The mind, though apparently defeated by reality in the attempt to impose order, achieves its own kind of victory.

Despite everything, the play is optimistic. Buried in the ashes of Kapodistrias' defeat and the miserable behaviour of Greece's factional leaders remains a bed of live embers which will ignite future generations. 'Greece is a continuous process', says George Seferis,³⁵ and Kazantzakis, with his long-range vision, continues to view this process as a victory for Greekness: not so much now for his limited 1937 conception of Greekness—the imposition of order over chaos—as for something more inclusive which joins Kapodistrias' rationalism 'mellowly' to a compassionate humanism. The final cry belongs to Kapodistrias, but the very last words, we recall, belong to Makriyannis, and it is the embrace of these two at the end that is Kazantzakis' ultimate symbol for the future: the one by which he conveys his realization that the kind of intellectual contribution the penman can make, while necessary and good, is not in itself enough.

Such was Kazantzakis' offering to a Greece about to be liberated from the Germans, and such was his anticipatory vision of his own practical role—his unsuccessful attempt at direct political intervention in 1945–6. Anyone who knows the nature of Greek political life during those two years will hardly need to be informed that neither the direct intervention nor the play itself conquered the eyeless Titans.

Kazantzakis' foray into politics as man of action is too big a subject to be considered here. But we can look briefly into the unique opportunity the National Theatre accorded him: to have *Kapodistrias* enter the nation's intellectual, artistic—and political!—life ever so briefly.

At the beginning of 1946, Kazantzakis was at the height of his

35. 'The Art of Poetry XIII: George Seferis', *Paris Review*, Fall 1970, p. 60.

prestige, at least among liberals and moderate leftists.³⁶ He was president of the Society of Greek writers (*Εταιρία Ἑλλήνων Λογοτεχνῶν*) and was soon to be nominated by this Society and also by the League of Greek Writers (*Σύνδεσμος Ἑλλήνων Λογοτεχνῶν*) for the Nobel Prize, along with Sikelianos.³⁷ In addition, his friend George Theotokas, whose involvement in Kazantzakis' play we have already seen, was then the director of the National Theatre. Thus it is not surprising that the honour of a première on Independence Day, 25 March 1946, was offered to Kazantzakis. The socialist newspaper *Μάχη* made much of this in its special pre-holiday issue of 24 March, publishing an appropriate excerpt from the play and announcing the 'festive performance' of Kazantzakis' *ἐθνικὸ δρᾶμα* scheduled for the morrow. Mrs. Kazantzakis tells us that the performance drew tears from many in the audience.³⁸ The review in *Machi* on 27 March confirmed that an 'enthusiastic' audience found the play 'moving'. Praise came also from the centrist newspaper *Kathimerini*,³⁹ and even Elli Alexiou, generally antagonistic to Kazantzakis, granted the première 'a relative success'.⁴⁰

But this success was very relative indeed, and very short-lived. Within twenty-four hours, the production of this work meant to transcend factionalism and preach concord had stirred up a factionalist controversy which resulted in the closing of the National Theatre less than a month later!

To understand why the play's message was torn in this way by factionalism's teeth, we must remember that Independence Day, 1946, was less than a week before the controversial general elections for parliament which had been declared originally for January 1946 and then rescheduled for Sunday, 31 March. Far

36. In addition to Laourdas' high estimation (see footnote 30, above), some other testimony c. 1944–6 may be seen in: I. M. Panayiotopoulos, *Δέκα δοκίμια*: A: 'Η Ἐγρήγορη, Νέα Ἑστία, XXXVI (1944), 624; I. M. Panayiotopoulos, 'Η πνευματικὴ ζωή. Ὁ Ν. Καζαντζάκης, Καθημερινή, 12 June 1945, p. 1; L. Koukoulas, 'Η περίπτωση Καζαντζάκη, *Μάχη*, 30 Dec. 1946, p. 2.

37. The nomination came on 27 May 1946. See *Tetrahosia Grammata*, p. 389, also the announcement in *Nea Estia*, XXXIX (1946), 640.

38. Helen Kazantzakis, p. 437.

39. 28 March 1946, p. 1. But the reviewer admits that he was only able to stay for the first act.

40. Elli Alexiou, *Γιὰ τὸ γίνεαι μεγάλος* (Athens, 1966), p. 237.

from signifying a return to the normalcy of the democratic process after ten difficult years without parliament, these impending elections precipitated further polarization to such a degree that the communists and a portion of the non-communist left boycotted the polls, thereby removing themselves from possible membership in the legislature, and deepening the country's schism. It was in this worsening atmosphere that the decision was made, in February, to resume guerrilla warfare.⁴¹ The communist newspaper *Πιζοσπάσις*, in its pre-holiday edition, 24 March, reported a proclamation from the Central Committee of EAM which was a veiled threat of resumed hostilities: 'As in '21, the Greek people will fearlessly continue the struggle. . . .' And on the eve of the elections an armed group of EAM captured the village of Lithoron in the Olympus range, only to retreat upon the arrival of British forces. 'Pour les groupes de partisans isolés . . . , c'est le signal du troisième round. Ils commencent à déterrer les armes.'⁴² In short, the next phase of the Civil War was already smouldering.

Given this situation, it would have been a miracle had Kazantzakis' message been appreciated. Though some few exceptional souls did respond in the spirit of moderation and fairness which the play itself had attempted to embody,⁴³ the expected interpretations according to preconceived positions began to be articulated the very next day. The extremist newspaper *Estia*, on 26 March, characterized the work as propaganda deliberately falsifying history. The evidence offered was Kazantzakis' favourable portrayal of «τὸ χειρότερον προϊόν τοῦ ἐμφυλίου παραγμοῦ», namely Makriyannis, in contrast to his adverse treatment of Kolokotronis, whom he transformed into a 'shark' and of Kapodistrias, whom he transformed into a despot. As for the cry of concord at the end: this was seen as a

41. Tsoucalas, *The Greek Tragedy*, p. 100.

42. Dominique Eudes, *Les Kapetanios: la guerre civile grecque de 1943 à 1949* (Paris, 1970), p. 346.

43. The anonymous reviewer for *Kathimerini* has already been mentioned. Fairness was also displayed in notices in: *Βραδυνή*, 30 March 1946, p. 2 ('Kazantzakis presents an arbitrary version of Kapodistrias, but poetry has a right to do this'); *Akropolis*, 31 March 1946, p. 2; *Nea Estia*, XXXIX (1946), 371 (Aim. Hourmouziotis); and quintessentially in George Theotokas' attempts to defend the production (footnote 47, below).

«κομματική διακήρυξις», a ‘party proclamation’. The following day, an additional note complained that the historical Kapodistrias, who spoke *katharévousa*, was made by Kazantzakis to speak not only demotic but atrocious demotic. ‘At least’, *Estia* concluded, ‘he wasn’t made to speak Russian, [which] would have been more in keeping with the author’s purposes.’ A basically similar position, though expressed in a non-vituperative tone, was taken by the reviewer for *Ethnos* on the same day; he suggested that Kazantzakis’ interpretation of the historical events over-emphasized the clash of conflicting interests in a way which gave ‘the impression of class struggle’ and therefore placed the work in ‘the context of historical materialism’.

Predictably, the leftist press expressed exactly the opposite view. Ideologically, the play should have taken ‘a more critical position towards the Revolution of 1821 so that the Revolution’s social significance might have been disclosed more objectively’, complained the socialist organ *Machi* in its otherwise favourable review.⁴⁴ In the communist *Rizospastis*, Markos Avyeris noted his concurrence so long as Kazantzakis presented Kapodistrias with his ‘historical traits of . . . the dictatorial ruler’, but demurred as soon as the protagonist became a symbol: a ‘spiritual hero with a divine mission’.⁴⁵

Kazantzakis’ daring attempt to fuse, or at least to reconcile, existentialism with Aristotelianism, ‘Kapodistrias Martyr’ with ‘Kapodistrias Tyrannos’, fell on deaf ears. Even so astute and fair-minded a critic as Angelos Terzakis saw Kapodistrias monoptically, as incarnating the ideology of nihilism.⁴⁶

On the one side, Kazantzakis was condemned as a communist propagandist while on the other he was equally condemned as a symbolist, existentialist and/or nihilist—positions repugnant to the left. Despite the predictability of the responses, the controversy might have evolved into precisely the kind of fruitful intellectual debate that Kazantzakis had desired. Theotokas, for example, was reminding the public, via the pages of *Nea Estia*, that Kazantzakis could not possibly be a communist propagandist, since his world-view had been attacked ‘with great severity by the best-known intellectuals representing

44. 27 March 1946, p. 1, reviewed by L. Koukoulas.

45. 31 March 1946, p. 2. 46. *Ἀγγλοελληνική Ἐπιθεώρηση*, II (1946), 95–6.

Marxism in Greece: Kostas Varnalis, Markos Avyeris, and Vasilis Rotas'.⁴⁷ But another, larger factor soon entered the picture. This was the rightist-monarchist campaign against the National Theatre itself.

Even before the production of *Kapodistrias*, Kazantzakis had set himself up as a target for those who were attempting to suppress free theatrical expression. The relevant events occurred nine months previously, beginning on 19 June 1945, when a gang of about ten royalist youths began a vociferous political demonstration in the stalls of the National Theatre as soon as the actor T. Karousos made his entrance as Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, with the result that the performance had to be discontinued.⁴⁸ Two days later, another gang mounted the stage at the Lyric Theatre and sang the Royalist Anthem, this time at a performance of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*; bullets were fired and several actors were wounded.⁴⁹ The next day, 22 June, Constantine Tsatsos, then Minister of the Interior, issued a statement accusing both extremes of 'impeding the effort to establish calm', the one by means of organized attacks, the other by presenting 'propagandistic works . . .'.⁵⁰ Unable to see how *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar* could be termed propagandistic works, a group of intellectuals, professors, academicians, etc., called upon the Minister, were refused an audience, and therefore issued a public protest in which they expressed their revulsion against such hindrances to free expression and requested 'the immediate intervention of the state' and of Tsatsos personally 'for the protection of the Greek people's freedom of thought and [their] democratic liberties'. Sikelianos signed first, as honorary president of the Society of Greek writers, and Kazantzakis signed second, as the Society's president, followed by the other officers and board members, *inter alios*.⁵¹

Thus Kazantzakis—not to mention Sikelianos—had publicly sided with the National Theatre in June of 1945, a fact which helps explain, I believe, the modulation of the attack against

47. 'Η πρώτη μεταπολεμική περίοδος τοῦ Ἑθνικοῦ Θεάτρου, Νέα Ἑστία, XXXIX (1946), 472.

48. *Rizospastis*, 21 June 1945, p. 2.

49. *Rizospastis*, 22 June 1945, p. 1; Τὸ πνεῦμα σὲ διωγμῷ, Ἐλεύθερα Γράμματα, 30 June 1945, pp. 1–2.

50. Ὁ Σαίξπηρ κομμουνιστής, *Ριζοσπάστης*, 23 June 1946, p. 1.

51. Ἐλεύθερα Γράμματα, 30 June 1945, pp. 1–2.

Kapodistrias, nine months later, into an attack on the Theatre itself, especially after it was announced that Kazantzakis' 'propagandistic drama' would be followed by Sikelianos' play *Sibyl*. As Theotokas wrote at the time: Because Kazantzakis and Sikelianos had publicly supported democracy as opposed to monarchy in the ferment preceding the elections of 31 March, and because they had opposed all forms of political reaction, they were labelled communists and traitors. After the monarchists had won the elections, the campaign against the National Theatre took on a 'clearly political character. The pretext was that we had produced Nikos Kazantzakis' *Kapodistrias* on the occasion of the national holiday, 25 March, and had announced that we were going to present Angelos Sikelianos' *Sibyl* two months later. . . . Many rightist newspapers commenced, then, a furious polemic against the two poets', not to mention that a certain general showed up at various ministries threatening to rally the Maniots to go and burn down the National Theatre because the play *Kapodistrias* had compromised the good name of his forebears (ἔθιγε τὴν οἰκογενειακὴν του ὑπόληψιν).⁵²

The newspaper attacks climaxed towards the end of April. On the 24th, *Kathimerini* pleaded for a cessation of the vilification, stressing that art has a right to be judged as art. *Ellikon Aima* responded the next day, agreeing that art is art and consequently cannot be judged by political criteria. 'But when art is employed for political—and even more for class—propaganda, it cannot invoke any form of asylum. So much for that thrice-vulgar (χυδαιότατον) EAM-ite Sikelianos and his *Sibyl*' which the National Theatre intended to mount 'as a kind of continuation of the nauseating (ἐμετικῶν) *Kapodistrias*'. The writer then applauded the Theatre's announcement that plans for *Sibyl* had been dropped. *Embras*, on the same day, under the front-page headline 'Scandal', exhorted the Minister of Education to intervene without delay in the affairs of the National Theatre, since public opinion had grown indignant regarding the continuation—in front of a practically empty house⁵³—'of a work of EAM-communist propaganda . . . such

52. *Nea Estia*, XXXIX (1946), 471–2.

53. Helen Kazantzakis, p. 438, claims contrariwise that *Kapodistrias* was withdrawn from the stage 'at the very moment when it was beginning to play to a full house'.

as the indescribable *Kapodistrias* of Nikolai Kazan [sic]. After complaining as well about Sikelianos, the writer urged that this entire EAM-communist clique of literary 'amateurs' should be barred from 'our National Stage'.

The campaign was effective, causing the directorate of the National Theatre to decide to withdraw *Kapodistrias* on the pretext of financial loss. *Ta Nea* of 26 April, reporting this, commented that the play had never been given a chance, and that in any case a National Theatre should not have to depend on commercial success. Praising the work, it lamented the 'systematic attack' against this play in particular, and the violent political passions of the times.

So effective was the campaign in the repressive atmosphere following the elections, it not only suppressed *Kapodistrias* and *Sibyl* but closed the National Theatre entirely from late April, after the withdrawal of Kazantzakis' play, until early November, when the Theatre reopened with Aeschylus' *Persians*, to be followed by Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (!).⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the rightist gangs turned their attention to other theatres.⁵⁵

In sum, Kazantzakis' play, meant to transcend factionalist clichés, was itself the victim of preconceived positions which inhibited free discussion. The situation is well described by George Theotokas in a passage which, though written many years later with neither *Kapodistrias* nor Kazantzakis specifically in mind, seems a direct analysis of Kazantzakis' predicament.⁵⁶ During the terrible years of civil strife, says Theotokas, there were a few 'independent intellectuals and brave journalists' who tried to preserve 'the rights of the intellect, the respect of each man for his fellow men, the sense of justice and the possibilities of social progress for the future'. But, he continues, 'whoever speaks such a language in times when fanaticism and internecine hatreds have broken out . . . naturally should not expect to find himself surrounded by understanding and approval. So it was

54. P. Rigas, *Τὸ Ἑθνικὸ Θέατρο, Ἐλεύθερα Γράμματα*, 1 Oct. 1946, p. 288; also issue of 15 Oct. 1946, p. 311, and issue of 1 Nov. 1946, p. 327.

55. *Ἐλεύθερα Γράμματα*, 15 June 1946, p. 216, laments the invasion of the Mousouri Theatre by a band of 'nationalists'.

56. 'Η 28 Ὀκτωβρίου, τὸ ΕΑΜ, ὁ Συμμοριτοπόλεμος καὶ ἡ νέα μορφή τοῦ κόσμου, *Τὸ Βῆμα*, 23 Sept. 1958, p. 1; reprinted in Theotokas, *Πνευματικὴ πορεία* (Athens, 1961), pp. 118–23.

that those who took this intellectual position at that time quickly found themselves between two conflagrations, condemned simultaneously as secretly communist by the one side and as secretly fascist by the other, and assuredly as “traitors” by both, because both had the need to consider themselves the exclusive expressions of the authentic spirit of Greek patriotism.’

What was Kazantzakis’ own reaction to his play’s failure to do anything but fan partisan flames? One thinks back to a different kind of failure in 1910, when *The Masterbuilder*, a work which in so many ways is Kapodistrias’ technical and thematic ancestor, as we have seen, had elicited nothing but silence after winning first prize in a dramatic contest. Then, Kazantzakis had lashed out furiously at the critics for their indifference. Abusive criticism may indicate a lack of polish, he roared, but silence is worse—it shows that our intellectuals are still rayahs, afraid of noise and light.⁵⁷ Thirty-six years later, Kazantzakis received all the noise he could have wished, though perhaps not much light. It is to his credit that he did not lash out again. He had grown mellow enough by this time to respond with equanimity. ‘Don’t worry about a thing’, he wrote to his wife from Aegina. ‘Kapodistrias’ turn will come soon, and our turn too. So long as we are well and our hearts are always pure and upright and our love does not crumble—all the rest is smoke and air.’⁵⁸ Perhaps we can say that Kazantzakis himself, at least, if no one else, had learned the lessons of his own play. Instead of responding with the insane *pallikariá* of a Georghakis Mavromichalis, as he would have done earlier in his career, he reacted with the philosophical vision of Kapodistrias joined to the humanity of Makriyannis. That his equanimity was a mellowed nationalism based on endurance, and was not a retreat to indifference or nihilism, is proved by the remainder of his career.

I said at the start that this play deserves to be translated, studied, and perhaps even revived on the stage. This is a relative judgement and not a claim that *Kapodistrias* is a fully successful dramatic work, even though it is, in my opinion, one of

57. Petros Psilorititis [Nikos Kazantzakis], *Oi Paytidες*, ‘Ακρόπολις, 21 June 1910; reprinted in *Nea Estia*, LXIV (1958), 1563–4.

58. Helen Kazantzakis, p. 439. The letter is dated simply ‘Aegina, Spring 1946’; we know that Kazantzakis was on Aegina from 18 April until the end of May (*Tetrakosia Grammata*, p. 389).

Kazantzakis' better dramas, and surely the best of the five written during the Occupation. The play's weakness cannot be disguised. Greatest of these is its poor verse, which means that a translated version may be an improvement. There is no doubt in my mind that if Kazantzakis had employed prose, the result would have been much better. The problem is not just that many of the lines are 'flabby', as N. Vrettakos has convincingly demonstrated;⁵⁹ it is that the poetry forces the play into a uniformity of rhythm and diction which erases any differences among the various characters. Kapodistrias and Makriyannis, though poles apart in education and background, speak exactly alike, nor can either of their modes of discourse be distinguished from those of Kolokotronis, the Maniot Giorghakis Mavromichalis, or the islander Ghikas. In short, Kazantzakis, though attempting in other ways in this work to exploit the demotic tradition, did not exploit that tradition's most central element, language, in an effective way—something he was able to do only when he turned to prose. Instead, all too often, we get an artificial *mélange* of colloquialisms and 'high style' such as the following, spoken (incredibly) by Makriyannis:

*Τὴ δύναμή του προσκυνῶ, μὰ δὲ σταυρῶνῶ
τὰ χέρια· πῆρα σβάρνα τὸ Μοριά καὶ τ' ἄγρια
ροδόλησα τῆς Ρούμελης βουνά, γιὰ νὰ 'ρθῶ
μετὰ καὶ νὰ σοῦ πῶ τὴν πάσα ἀλήθεια ἀτός μου.* (p. 18)

In comparison with these linguistic problems, the play's other weaknesses are secondary. Not enough explanation is offered for Miaoulis' treachery, considering the importance this receives in the plot. Kapodistrias' expectation that Kolokotronis will obey his summons and return to establish order seems naïve, given the stance Kolokotronis has taken previously. The suggestion that the assassination takes place during Eastertide is too blatant a distortion of history in the interests of the Christ parallel. The question of land-reform, so crucial for half the play, is completely forgotten in the *dénouement*. The third act does not sustain the intensity of the first two. The inevitability of

59. N. Vrettakos, *Νίκος Καζαντζάκης, ἡ ἀγωνία του καὶ τὸ ἔργο του* (Athens, n.d. [1957], pp. 598–9. Cf. A. Thrilos in *Nea Estia*, XXXIX (1946), 438–9.

Kapodistrias' death has already been established, and thus we look in this final act not for some new development in the plot, but for some new insight into the significance of what happens. But all the lines of interpretation have already been established by the close of the second act, and no new insight is forthcoming. The third act must therefore sustain itself entirely on momentum generated previously; this it does to some extent, but with a decrease in intensity, a trailing off consistent perhaps with Kapodistrias' fatalistic acceptance of death, but inconsistent with the optimism he retains and with Kazantzakis' own optimistic insistence that the death will be a *kraughi* heeded in the future.

Without disguising these and other weaknesses, one can still claim that *Kapodistrias* deserves an important place in the Kazantzakis canon owing to merits which outweigh the defects. If nothing else, what Kazantzakis accomplished here should help us distinguish the nature and extent of his accomplishments in the novels. In *Kapodistrias* we see him using a living myth and wedding this, without too much strain, to history. Myth thus becomes not a flight from reality, but a superior entrée. We see him making effective use of folk elements (and even, on occasion, of strong direct speech, despite the general flabbiness of his verse).⁶⁰ The play evokes past eras of hellenism, integrating them with the present and in this way making an implicit statement about Greekness. It incorporates Kazantzakis' *idées fixes* about life in general, his nation, and his own role as an intellectual *engagé*, yet does so with dramatic warrant and a relative avoidance of schematization. It is a drama of ideas, unashamed of its intellectuality, while at the same time it is never coldly or exclusively intellectual. All these reasons, and others which I have mentioned in passing, make it worthy of our attention—both in and for itself, and also as an earnest of what Kazantzakis was able to do more successfully later on.

Dartmouth College
Hanover,
New Hampshire

60. See, for example, the Souliotissa's speech on pp. 117–18, or the Old Man's strong lines on the middle of p. 36.